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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0855

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000295

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN - GEHRENBECK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KDEM KG

SUBJECT: KYRGYZSTAN'S "PUBLIC PARLIAMENT": DISTRACTION OR SYMBOL OF UNIFICATION?

REF: A. BISHKEK 71

1B. BISHKEK 282

1C. BISHKEK 283

1D. BISHKEK 173

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Classified By: DCM Lee Litzenberger for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In defiant response to the December parliamentary elections, Kyrgyz opposition and civil society groups have established a "public parliament," with the stated purpose of discussing alternative views on issues of "social concern." With two public meetings to date, the public parliament has sparked comments from civil society and the government regarding its merit and legitimacy, gaining wide coverage in the state-controlled and opposition press. The public parliament has also announced plans to hold a "kurultai," or a traditional "people's assembly," in Bishkek April 12. While the public parliament has not united the political opposition, it has brought them together for serious discussion of issues -- and has proved an irritant to the government. End Summary.

A Parliament for the People by the Few

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12. (SBU) Following what the opposition called "false" parliamentary elections last December, a number of opposition politicians and civil society leaders, led by former Foreign Minister Alikbek Jekshenkulov and his "For Justice" movement, formed a shadow "public parliament" in January. Their stated purpose was to "discuss and propose alternative viewpoints on social-political and economic issues affecting the country" (Ref A). The public parliament elected Abdygany Erkebayev, former Speaker of the Kyrgyz Legislative Assembly, as its "speaker," and it chose civil society leader Asiya Sasikbayeva as the "deputy speaker." The 94 members are drawn mainly from likeminded opposition parties that failed to gain entry into the parliament and groups, including the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, Ata Meken, Ar

Namys, Asaba, and the Green Party.

¶13. (SBU) With two public meetings to date, the public parliament has vowed to continue its political and economic discussions in opposition to the official Kyrgyz Parliament's agenda. The first meeting focused on the impending privatization of state energy assets, and public parliament members speculated that Kyrgyzstan's energy sector would fall prey to corruption once privatized, negatively affecting its ability to meet the country's growing energy demands. The second session, held on March 19, included discussions on Kyrgyzstan's political and economic development, or lack thereof, since the March 2005 "tulip revolution."

¶14. (C) Public parliament and For Justice organizers announced plans to hold a nationwide people's assembly, or "kurultai," on March 29, but have since postponed the meeting to April ¶112. According to Jekshenkulov, the reasons for the delay include difficulty finding an appropriate meeting place (Note: Bishkek authorities have refused the use of the central sports stadium and philharmonic hall. Ref B. End Note.) and ambiguity regarding President Bakiyev's trip to Germany (Ref C). Jumping on the bandwagon, former opposition MP Azimbek Beknazarov told reporters March 3 that his "revolutionary committee" (see Ref D) would participate.

#### Hostile Government Reaction

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¶15. (C) The government's reaction to the public parliament has been harsh. Justice Minister Marat Kaiyпов has questioned the public parliament's legitimacy, arguing that the organization should be legally registered as a public union. Speaker of Parliament Adakhan Madumarov, known for his disdain of the opposition, called the group

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"unconstitutional," claiming that Kyrgyzstan's supreme law does not provide for the creation of a "shadow" parliament. The Prosecutor General's office sent a letter, which Erkebayev read out dismissively at the March 19 session, ordering the members to follow the law and reminding that the people had "exercised their power" through the elections. Partly as a result of the government's strong reaction, the public parliament has been covered widely in both the state-controlled and the opposition press.

#### Merely a Discussion Group?

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¶16. (C) Public parliament "Speaker" Erkebayev told Poloff March 26 that the group does not have a headquarters or staff and, therefore, does not need to be registered. He instead characterized the public parliament as an ad hoc group of "free individuals" that occasionally meets to discuss current events. He also said that the group plans to submit its resolutions to the government as "recommendations" for further consideration. Erkebayev confided that the public parliament's access to financial resources remains a problem, and it has thus far been reliant mostly on the personal contributions made by ex-MP and Ata Meken member Temir Sariyev. He confirmed that requests to use the central sports stadium and philharmonic for the planned kurultai were denied, and he vowed that the public parliament would never "take to the streets." Erkebayev insisted that the group does not have "revolutionary aims," but would rather use its constitutional right to assemble, hold discussions, and propose its viewpoints on various issues peacefully.

#### A Useful Tool, if Used Correctly

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¶17. (C) In a March 3 meeting with the Ambassador, ex-MP Tairbek Sarpashev said that the public parliament could be a useful tool to organize the opposition. The group's possible ability to garner public support, utilizing the expertise of

members like Abdygany Erkebayev, is the main reason why the government has chosen not to ignore its activities, he added.

Sarpashev, whose Turan party did not gain any seats during the December parliamentary election, also claimed that the presidential administration is aware that the public parliament's criticism of the parliament could eventually spill over to all branches of the government, possibly inciting public action.

Comment

¶8. (C) The public parliament is still very much in its infancy. Some local commentators have dismissed the public parliament as a distraction that is being used to boost the image of select opposition figures, like former FM Jekshenkulov. Others see it as an organization well-suited to unite disparate opposition groups. While the public parliament has not united the fractured political opposition, it has brought them together for serious discussion of issues -- and has proved an irritant to the government as a reminder of the flawed December 16 parliamentary elections.

YOVANOVITCH